

GC2 Press® Premium Commentary for Kingdom Assignment: The Relentless Pursuit of Obedience (A Study of Nehemiah) By Dr. Jeff Gravens, Pastor, First Baptist Church, Sulphur Springs, Texas

Lesson 10: TRUE CONFESSION

Focal text: Nehemiah 9:1-3

Background: Nehemiah 9:1-37

MAIN IDEA: Because of God's righteousness, we must come before Him with humility and confession.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE: When have we participated in a corporate experience of repentance and brokenness seeking mercy and forgiveness from our gracious God?

QUICK READ: People need the Lord because of Who He is: the Creator, a covenant God and compassionate (17, 31); and because of who we are: arrogant, foolish, idolatrous and rebellious.

INTRODUCTION

The Bible provides many great examples of confession, perhaps none better known than David's found in Psalm 51. The superscription prior to the Psalm provides the context for this plea for help. The confession comes on the heels of King David being confronted by the prophet Nathan after David's adultery with Bathsheba and his attempt to cover it up through lies and murder. You can read the sinful story in 2 Samuel 11-12.

Reading 2 Samuel 11-12 is like watching a car wreck take place in live action. Reading Psalm 51 is like watching the accident scene being cleared and the victim being taken to a physician. In Psalm 51:4 David confessed to God, "Against you, you only, have I sinned." His sin involved Bathsheba, Uriah, and countless others. Yet, David acknowledged that ultimately, he sinned against his Creator, Sustainer, Provider. He has sinned against the One who created him in his mother's womb and knew the desires of his heart. It was not merely a mistake or a lapse in judgement. It is not an accident or a misstep. David knew that he willingly moved outside of the will of God. He appropriately labeled it sin and confessed it.

Nehemiah 9 is a long prayer which confesses sin. After reading the Law in chapter 8, the people are moved to confession.

Confession (Nehemiah 9:1-3)

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On the twenty-fourth day of the month the people gathered to worship the Lord “fasting and wearing sackcloth and putting dust on their heads” (9:1). These acts are connected to mourning, repentance, and confession. It was a demonstration of humility before God. In dramatic fashion, the people mourned over their sins and confessed their sins to the Lord.

Years in exile had driven the people of God back to the Scripture. In the Scripture, the people encountered God, and it led to revival. Raymond Brown said,

First, they listened to God’s Word, and then responded to its message by confessing their sins and by worshipping the God whose nature and promised guaranteed their pardon. This vital two-way relationship is inspired and encouraged throughout Scripture. Listening to God (Bible reading) and responding to him (prayer) are twin aspects of every believer’s experience. There can be no spiritual growth or development in Christian maturity without the regular cultivation of this dual privilege and discipline.¹

The people of God separate themselves from foreigners (9:2). This was not an act of exclusion or racism, but a desire for spiritual purity. It was an effort to remove false gods, false worship, and idols. The people of God fell prey to the spiritual practices of pagans. This move was a reset.

For six hours the people tuned their ear to the Word of God (9:3). The Word of God sparked the flames of confession. We are constantly bombarded with the world; how often do we encounter the Word? We are bombarded with horror and hate; how often do we seek refuge in the holy? In the Word of God we find the character and will of God. We are challenged and convicted.

Confession is a cry for help but also a declaration of the mighty works of God. It is not a plea for blessing but a humble acknowledgment of sin. In the previous chapter, the people read God’s Word and had a unified focus, were attentive, responsive, and teachable. Here they are once again reading God’s Word. It led them to confession.

By reading God’s Word you encounter God and have your sin exposed. Romans 7:7, “What shall we say, then? Is the Law sinful? Certainly not! Nevertheless, I would not have known what sin was had it not been for the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, “You shall not covet.” As the people of God, exposed sin should lead us to confession.

¹ Raymond Brown, *The Message of Nehemiah (The Bible Speaks Today)* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1998), 141.

We sin against a holy God. When you sin, you sin against your Creator, Sustainer, Provider. You sin against One who is compassionate, gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in love. You sin against the holy God who stands as your judge.

God desires a broken and contrite heart. Psalm 51:17, “My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart.” We should never brush off our sin. We should not be dismissive or flippant. It is not enough to casually promise, “Oh, I’ll do better next time.” Rather, we should be grieved.

Far too often we are far too comfortable with the label “sinner.” I cringe a bit when I hear Christians say something to the effect of, “Well, were all just sinners.” True! Yes! We are sinners! Yet, this should lead us to confession. This should leave us with broken and contrite hearts.

I frequently refer to my congregation as the Holy People of Sulphur Springs because I don’t want them to cling to the label “sinner.” Rather, I want them to walk in the identity provided through Jesus Christ. He died for sin. He rose from the dead to provide victory. In baptism, we commit to follow Him into a new way of life which will one day give way to eternal life.

Blessing (Nehemiah 9:4-5)

This section provides a list of Levites who presided over this worship celebration. Prior to prayer, the Levites led the people in blessing the name of the Lord. God is deserving of all blessing for all good things come from Him (James 1:17).

Prayer for Deliverance (9:6-37)

The Levites lead the people in prayer. This section contains the longest recorded prayer in the Bible (outside of the Psalms). It recounts the character of God:

God of creation (9:6): He made the heavens, all the starry hosts, the earth and all that is on it, seas and all that is in them. All of creation declares His glory, majesty, and sovereignty.

God who calls people (9:7-8): He chose Abram and brought him out of Ur of the Chaldeans and renamed him Abraham. He changed Abram which means “exalted father” to “father of a multitude.” Genesis 12 tells the story of how God called Abraham, “I will

make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great and you will be a blessing.”

God of redemption (9:9-11): He cares for those who suffer (Exodus 3:7). In Exodus, God brought His people through the Red Sea and delivered them from Pharaoh.

God who provides (9:12-25): He provides for His people in significant ways.

- Guidance (v12, 19)
- Instruction (vv13-14, 20)
- Basic necessities (vv15, 20-21)
- Forgiveness and compassion (vv16-19)
- Clothing and health (v21)
- Home (vv22, 25)
- Families (v23)
- Victories (v24)

God who is compassionate (9:26-35): He routinely saw His people respond to His goodness with disobedience and rebellion. While He rebuked, corrected, and disciplined, God also poured upon compassion.

God who hears (9:36-37): The prayer ends with a note of trust. They pray to a God who hears their pleas for help. 2 Chronicles 7:14 says, “If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.”

Nehemiah 9 provides a testimony of God’s character and the conduct of His people. The prayer is a mosaic of biblical quotations, recollections, and stories of God’s mighty work. God hears as His people pray. God forgives as His people confess. God acts as His people plea.

Reading God’s Word and responding to Him in prayer are twin aspects of every believer’s life. There can be no spiritual growth in Christian maturity without the regular habit of this privilege, joy, and discipline. Every encounter with God in the pages of Scripture reveals something of His nature, character, will, work, and promises. These discoveries lead us to responsive conversations with the God who spoke to us first.

CONCLUSION

You don’t read the Bible like you read a social media post or the newspaper. It’s not merely a nice thought or a challenging idea. It is a life changing encounter with God Almighty.

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The Word of God is my favorite name for the Bible. It is a name that needs no interpretation. The Bible is not the word of man or opinion of man. Due to its source, we must respond to the Bible in a specific way.

The Bible is authoritative: The Bible establishes truth. The Bible prescribes practices and behavior. It is the final authority in matters of faith and life for every believer, and it provides God's perfect counsel for everyday life.

The Bible is sufficient: The Bible is not outdated or old-fashioned. Modern-day hot topics are settled in the pages of Scripture. The Bible is the sufficient word on issues of sexual ethics and sexual identity, racism, the family, and matters of life and death. With a proper understanding of the Bible, you are sufficiently equipped to live out your faith in the home, workplace, and community.

The Bible is effective: It delivers upon its promises. It peers into our lives, observes, judges, convicts, comforts, molds, shapes, and transforms. You might say that we don't read the Bible, but the Bible reads us. Some people don't read the Bible because it is too effective at pointing out sin. Many people don't read the Bible because it is too effective at pointing out a lack of spiritual understanding and spiritual depth.

The Bible leads us to Jesus: To read the Bible and not fall in love with Jesus is a tragedy. To read the Bible and fall in love with Jesus changes your eternity.